WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 MAY 1990

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER:
GREAT NEWS! WALL STREET HOUSE MOVE IN SIGHT

THE END OF THE WALL STREET JOURNEY IS IN SIGHT! Today I have been given every indication that the city will allow us to carry on with our plans to move the house, now located at 1015 Wall Street, to the corner of Main at Beakes, and to proceed to develop the structure into a museum.

If I sound tentative in any way it is because, due to the deadline for the publication of *WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS*, I must write this prior to the city council meeting where the official stamp of approval must be obtained.

Right now city council has not acted, but I have every confidence that we will be given an official green light. By the time you read this we expect to have a firm date on which the move will take place, and will be well into implementing plans laid down over the past ten months.

So many people have already become involved. Their assistance has nudged this project along seemingly slowly, yet as fast as possible.

Before we are done, even more of you will contribute your time, your energy, your ideas, and some of your money (!) to insure success of this project.

We have a very exciting opportunity to establish a new institution in this community, something that Society members have sought to bring about since 1857. Do you have time? Energy? Ideas? Money? We need your help.

I trust you will soon see a picture in the *Ann Arbor News* of an 1830's house, carefully making its way from Wall Street to Main Street, to a new location and a new function. Better yet, come and watch in person when the actual moving date is announced.

Karen O'Neal
665-2242

HOW TO JOIN WCHS

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to Washtenaw County Historical Society to: WCHS Membership, 312 South Division Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2204. Information: 996-3008.

Annual dues are $10, individual; $18 a couple. Senior individual (60) $8, senior couple $14. Sustaining dues are $50, commercial, $25, and student, $5. Only one of a couple need be 60 to qualify as seniors.

WCHS BUS TOUR JUNE 9 WILL FEATURE WESTERN WASHTENAW CENTENNIAL FARMS, CHICKEN LUNCHEON

In spite of all the educational institutions, high tech industry, advancing urbanization and transient population in Washtenaw county, there is still considerable farming in western parts of the county.

Dozens of these farms have been owned by the same family for 100 years or more, some even for 150 years or more.

The annual WCHS bus tour Saturday, June 9, will spend a day in the country visiting a few of these farms, seeing others in passing.

The tour will stop for a chicken luncheon at St. Andrew's United Church of Christ in Dexter.

Along the way a stop is also planned at the 150 year old Bethel United Church of Christ south of Pleasant Lake.

The fee will be $20.00 per person. Prepaid reservations required by Friday, June 1, to WCHS tour, 537 Riverview Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. See coupon on page 5.

Board bus at 8:45 a.m. at the Maple Village Shopping Center near First of America Bank, 195 North Maple Road. Return by 5:00 p.m. Information 663-8826 or 663-8159 (the latter number **evenings only**).

ANNUAL WCHS MEETING WEDNESDAY, MAY 16 FEATURES 'MR. BONES'

Ann Arbor's 90 year old virtuoso of the bones, Percy Danforth, will entertain at the Washtenaw County Historical Society annual potluck dinner meeting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 16, at Dixboro Church Fellowship Hall.

The percussion instrument Danforth plays, originally made from animal bones, is now usually wood. Danforth is an award winning master of the rhythm instrument who has demonstrated his skill across the United States.

Those attending are asked to bring a dish to pass serving 8 to 10 persons and their own table ware. Coffee and tea will be furnished. The annual meeting will include election of officers.

The church is at 5221 Church Road off Dixboro just north of Plymouth Road. Information: 663-2017 or 663-8826.

OLD HOUSE CLINICS SET

Ann Arbor Area Preservation Alliance is sponsoring old house clinics at 2:00 p.m. second Sundays at Leslie Science Center, 1831 Traver Road. Topics are (May 13) decorative paving by Peter Pollack; (June 10) brick restoration by David Houck; (July 8) foundations by Russell Payeur; (August 12) wall papering by Rolland Frey and Cindy Mallery; and (September 9) windows by Patrick Owen. Information: 665-2112

WHAT IS IT? GAME OFFERED SCHOOLS, GROUPS

WCHS offers a traveling exhibit of small artifacts set up as a humorous "What is it?" game to schools for children and another for adults.

They are available for classes and meetings subject to volunteer availability. For information call Arlene Schmid 665-8773.

ARBORETUM RENAISSANCE:

RESTORATION OF OLD VARIETIES, LABELS UNDERWAY

It's not a U-M football game, it's not the Ann Arbor Art Fairs, but it attracts an estimated 100,000 or more visitors a year in Ann Arbor.

It's the University of Michigan's Nichols Arboretum, founded in 1907 between Geddes Avenue and the Huron River.

Professor Harrison L. Morton, associate dean of the U-M School of Natural Resources and director of the Arboretum, gave a slide talk on "Managing Nichols Arboretum for Historical Integrity" at the April WCHS meeting.

He started by offering free draft copies of a new pocket guide to the Arboretum, soon to be published, as well as a new guide to 50 of the most important trees and plants to be found there.

There were also available some copies of the July/August 1988 *Michigan Alumnus* featuring an article on the Arboretum.

The pocket guide is being produced this semester by a group of master's degree students who are working to produce interpretive walkway guides for central campus, medical campus and the Arboretum.

"The Arboretum has a long history, but in the last 15 or 20 years, perhaps a little bit longer, we've fallen behind a little bit in the sense that we have not made good use of the materials for teaching students or working with the public in terms of being able to provide maps and lists of materials," Professor Morton said.

"It seems kind of strange that an arboretum with hundreds of different kinds of plants did not have a list available to visitors and school children.

"These materials are now available and we will keep coming out with new materials. We're sending them directly to grade schools and asking the teachers if they would like to bring school kids to the Arboretum.

"We know that a lot of recreation goes on in the Arboretum. We're not against that, but we feel that, particularly in a University setting, that if we do not use the state funds for an educational and research purpose then we are missing out on our duty."

"The Arboretum continues to change over time. No living materials stay the same. Some of the materials that were planted in 1910 are now being

Photos courtesy of Professor Morton

U-M's NICHOLS ARBORETUM
View from upper valley toward old orchard.

out competed by more vigorous, younger materials which were not introduced but came in on the wind or by squirrels and so on.

"One of our missions on the Arboretum is to go back and restore, as best we can, the historical plant materials.

"Now that is somewhat a tough task because in many cases we don't have good records. In some cases we do.

"Instead of putting in new varieties which are available on the market now, we're trying to go back and find the names of the old materials which were there when the collection was started.

"The second step, of course, is to try to find those materials and find someone who could donate those materials.

"What a massive change we've seen in the 70 or so years since the Arboretum started. At that time it was some distance from central campus. Of course, the city has built up all around it.

It is now essentially surrounded by a metropolitan area and that makes it even more valuable than ever, simply because of it's location.

"The sign at the Geddes Avenue entrance saying, 'Nichols Arboretum, Don't...Don't...Don't...,' is not particularly encouraging and welcoming. We're trying to change the sign.

"We are restricted by the University to use white letters on blue, that's their general code. We are going to move most of this information, especially the 'don't' to the inside and simply say, 'Welcome to Nichols Arboretum.'

"Another group of master's students last year started to draw together much of the historical material which has been scattered here and there, much in Bentley Library, some in other places."

Their map showed seven or eight gifts of land to the University, totaling 120 to 125 acres, that make up the Arboretum.

The first piece was donated by Walter and Esther Nichols in 1906. It is the part which has the narrow entrance to Geddes Avenue. From the Geddes entrance, "the topography gently falls 180 feet in elevation to the southern bank of the Huron River," according to the new interpretive guide.

"One of the first persons to work on the Arboretum was O.C. Simonds, an 1878 alumnus who established what is now a department of landscape architecture.

"He became world famous for some elements of his landscape design, particularly what he called his 'long view.'"

Professor Morton showed some early views of the Arboretum, which had reverted from farm land. In recent views it was much more filled in.

"At one time this was the new gate. That gate has been moved by students several times over the years. Every time we managed to find it and bring it back. It's still on Geddes. I think that it's one of the symbols of Ann Arbor."

One of the early prints showed the main road leading from Geddes down into the Arboretum. In earlier years, cars were allowed to drive in. Other views showed the old greenhouse.

"When the land was donated to the University, the stipulations were that it would be used for an arboretum and botanical garden. Those two still exist but they have evolved different facilities in different locations."

He noted that the U-M Botanical Garden was on Iroquois for a number of years before it moved to its present location on Dixboro Road.

"It was difficult to raise in the Arboretum many of the materials that professors of botany wanted to have grown. It wasn't the kind of research area that was needed for the time.

"Now we see the Arboretum probably as it looks today, at this hour [undulating green lawns dotted with student couples sunning themselves].

"We estimate that the Arboretum has somewhere over 100,000 visitors a year. We have done that by simply going out at various times of the day and making head counts and doing that over one or two seasons, then blowing that figure up to cover a year. We didn't even count the people who are in there after ten o'clock at night.

"Gil Jaeger, Arboretum superintendent, says there is never a day, never an hour of the day, when there is not someone in the Arboretum."

A 1927 commencement bulletin called attention to the peony gardens in the Arboretum which opened to the public that year. That was about five years after they were started. There also was a rose collection around the outside. An early view showed a fence around the peony garden.

They have a detailed 1932 map of the peony collection. The earliest flowering are in the section towards Ronald McDonald House. Midseason varieties are in the middle and the latest blooming are furthest away. A one time center aisle of grass has been replaced by chips.

"Joggers will run through there, which is fine, but we don't like football playing in the peonies which students tend to do as these plants are coming up. However, it's still a very nice collection."

ARBORETUM PEONY GARDEN

Professor Morton has two graduate students that work year around on the Arboretum. They are studying for master's degrees and they will go on to some of the major arboretums in the country.

"In other words, this is professional training for them. They are taking advanced classes in plant with Herb Wagner and others around campus. I recruit nationally and fund them on a year around basis.

"The peony collection was donated by the Dr. W.E. Upjohn family of Upjohn Pharmaceutical Company. He was an amateur peony developer and he had a very large collection. All the varieties were named.

"Much of the collection which was over in Kalamazoo has since been lost. I've tried to find some of the plants that are missing but I can't.

"There were 300 and some cultivars of peonies. We have about 250 left. Now the students are recording all the information on all the cultivars--when they flower, height, color, and making sure they match with what's described.

"The next step is to go to the American Peony Society and say "Here's what missing. Have you got any of the old varieties in your garden that you can positively identify? We'd like to incorporate them back into the collection."

The roses which were once all around the edge of the peony gardens, with all the varieties named, have all disappeared.

The roses were planted on a steep bank that is difficult to mow so they are going to start putting old roses back, not new varieties.

"We have many students working on the Arboretum now, both in undergraduate class projects as well as groups of master's students.

"One group of master's students wanted to think about different places on the Arboretum where we might have some kind of facility. Can you imagine taking 30 school kids down to the bottom of the Arboretum and all of a sudden there is a downpour?

"Where are the kids going to go? Where can we put some educational materials? This is a long run goal to have some kind of modest facility. One might be at the river, one might be in the flat area around the peony garden."

Student ideas include redistributing the peony collection, keeping all the materials, but also providing parking there. Another group thinking big, suggested building a bridge across the river.

Yet another group are working on the Geddes entrance. It is essentially inaccessible to the handicapped.

"We would like to make a small loop where people could get a long view across and still come in by wheelchair or walking, even if it's walking very carefully.

"We are thinking about moving the gate over slightly to allow some park-

ARBORETUM LILAC DISPLAY

ing or, at least, a place we could drop people off out of the traffic lane. Now a bus would have to stop in the middle of the street to drop school kids off.

"There's lots of little things that we can do. Here's a thing that's not too obvious, you drive by the Arboretum on Geddes and you don't see it because the shrub hedge is in the way. There is no good reason for that because there are fences behind it and more plant material.

"We're thinking of how we can redo that so that people as they go by, have a good view of the Arboretum."

He showed eroded paths as one of the problem areas and noted that the problem is made worse by the new mountain bikes.

"They seem to go everyplace, and the steeper the hill the better they like it."

"The mountain bikes haven't done all this. This is from pedestrian foot traffic as well. Joggers run through, R.O.T.C. runs through."

Finally, last winter, to cut some of the major erosion on a very popular trail, they reluctantly decided to put in some treads and risers over part of it.

"I can see where we could build stairs to the moon almost. I'm not advocating that. However, we're put in a position here with very high traffic."

"Shortly, we will be moving forward on some signing, for example, signs which will show the visitor where he is at any one time and how to get to the next point. We'll have locations of trees and plant materials, not only on the trees but on lists. Fifty trees are tagged now with large tags."

The earlier small tags, over the years, have dropped off or been stolen or the names have changed.

"We'll do another 200 or so this summer with a slightly less conspicuous sign."

One of the worst problems they have is sliding in winter. Many students and others have been injured sliding down hill on toboggans, cafeteria trays and whatever. "We need to be constantly vigilant about that."

He showed views of some of the more important plant collections. First was the *ericaceous* collection, rhododendrons, azaleas and others. The plants are doing well and they plan to improve that collection.

"Another collection which many people may remember was the lilacs. From what I gather, the Arboretum was famous for its lilacs.

"It was established on terraces which, as I understand it, had been farm terraces." There are several terraces four feet apart.

Trees and other shrubs have seeded in among the lilacs and are crowding them out. "Many of them are almost buried in the collection of materials that came in on their own."

"We have taken out much of the big old wood that is infested with lilac borer and, hopefully, many of these will sprout off the old roots. There's no guarantee though."

"Again the problem is trying to find old records of what all was there. We are in correspondence with some folks in Europe who have many of these old varieties which we hope to be able to get."

Another collection is the *Araliaceae* collection just off Geddes. A small collection of three or four species, it includes a large *Kalopanax* tree. Over the years a lot of other things have invaded it.

"You know, as soon as you start up a chain saw or chipper, somebody will come along and say why do you dare cut anything in the Arboretum.

"One of our educational problems is to convince people that what we are taking out are not valuable things, its the buckthorn and honeysuckle and all these things that come in and establish themselves freely.

"Dow field is about ten acres of prairie plants. The last couple of years Professor Bob Grese and myself have been working with some graduate students.

"We've devised a scheme whereby the field is divided into three sections. Part of it is burned in the spring, part in the fall and part not burned but mowed as it has been for 25 years.

"Fire is the key to get back the prairie plants that have been there and are there. This past week we've had a burn, a magnificent, hot burn, but well under control, that took all the woody plants down to the ground.

"The prairie plants' roots, being buried, are safe. They come right back up. In fact, I think it might be partly green today, just three days later. It's a natural way to get butterfly plant and others which are as natural part of a prairie system.

"We do not have a detailed map of where all the plant materials are. Two students have been working for almost two years now and we're at about 500 different plants that are on the Arboretum."

They are beginning to locate these, put them on the computer, make computer generated maps and tie all the information together.

He showed a Chinese fringetree, believed to be the only one in Michigan.

They have a very small wetland on the lower edge of the Arboretum. Some students this term are trying to figure out how to restore and keep it so the wet plants like marsh marigold do not disappear.

Run off from Harvard Place and elsewhere brings a lot of silt with it and tends to fill it up. "We need to stop that."

"We have a small research area in the Arboretum. Within a few days of putting some plants in, six trees were stolen, so we quickly put up a fence. Many of the neighbors objected to the fence. We only did so because of the problem of theft. Instead of painting it blue and gold as they did around Michigan Stadium, we decided to paint it black.

He showed the results of a windstorm about a year ago when 60 "magnificent white pines were either blown down or snapped off. These were some of the biggest and oldest trees. This was where many of the weddings took place."

"People who wanted to get married in the Arboretum would almost always pick this place. It's pretty well cleaned up now and we are starting to reestablish it.

"We also have a problem, a risk, that any tree, given enough time, will decay and fall over. We would be grossly negligent if we did not check occasionally for those trees we consider to be dangerous and remove them.

"We welcome any kind of passive recreation in the Arboretum, but we get jumped on by the railroad. The railroad says, 'hey, you're letting them go across the tracks.'

"No, we're not letting them go across. We have a sign we put up at the edge of the Arboretum that says 'do not cross the railroad track.' That lasts about 20 minutes.

"We're told that it's often University faculty members who will cut the fence and go through it.

"Perhaps you've seen the new bridge that is going across for joggers and hikers. That could be a problem if it brings motorized bikes into the Arboretum. It's near Dow Field and Huron Towers."

Steep hills in the Arboretum are time consuming to hand mow, he noted.

"But there are some magnificent plant materials in the Arboretum and, of course, one of our main goals is to keep them as best we can. We also want to introduce a lot more materials."

He showed a flowering dogwood and a pink flowering crab apple tree which would soon be in bloom again.

He showed examples of what O.C. Simonds had in mind when he became known for the "long view." It was not like looking down a city block and seeing the next and the next.

"It involved kind of a mystery in the landscape--you look into it and then it turns, and you wonder what is beyond that corner. That's the way the thing has been designed.

"We're always going to try to preserve the nice open space of the Arboretum, a magnificent part of it. I think in some cases, we are going to try to open up some of those views which have been limited and filled in by volunteer plants."

Someone asked if the underwater bridge that people used to drive over was still there. It's about 20-30 yards down river from the University Hospital Parking Lot 29, he said.

"You can see it when the dam is open or perhaps at noon when the sun is directly overhead."

Member Dorothy Mummery said her grandparents once owned land adjacent to the Nichols, which ran down to the river. Her grandmother sold it to the city and it became part of the Arboretum.

MRS. TOWNSEND GIVES DOLLS, OTHER ITEMS

Mrs. Richard (Edna) Townsend of Forest Avenue has given WCHS several items including two dolls, a jumping jack, cherry pitter, baby and dolls shoes, doll hair, children's books, a linen spread and three trunks.

ENTER DAD'S MUSTACHE IN KEMPF CONTEST

A mustache judging contest will be part of a summer sing-along and salute to dad sponsored by Kempf House in the park next door to 312 South Division at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 16. Also barbershop quartet music.

Kempt House is open to visitors 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and will be open during Art Fair in July.

CORNELL FIRST TO TEACH AMERICAN HISTORY

"American history is rising in importance in the estimation of the learned. Cornell University has a professor of American history—but it is the only one of the 369 college in our country which has ventured to make such an innovation."

—*Harper's Bazar*, November 11, 1871.

CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826.

WESTERN RESERVE GENEALOGY TOPIC

The Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County annual meeting, 1:30 p.m. Sunday, May 20, will include a talk by Diane V. Gagel, "Research in the Western Reserve" plus a panel on "Organizing a Family Reunion." It is in Lecture Hall 2, Liberal Arts and Science Building, Washtenaw Community College.

WASHTENAW COUNTY CENTENNIAL FARM TOUR

Saturday, June 9, 1990

Please make reservations for _____ persons at $20 each. Total enclosed: $_____. Reservations due Friday, June 1.

Send check or money order to:

WCHS
c/o Lawrence W. Ziegler
537 Riverview
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Please list name(s) as you wish them to appear on name tags.

HISTORIC HAPPENINGS INVOLVE :

COWBOYS, QUILTS, BASEBALL CARDS, FLEA MARKET, OXEN, BARNS, 1895 HOUSE RESTORATION, MICHIGAN WEEK

Chelsea Historical Society: High school forensics team will entertain Society and residents of Chelsea Methodist Home 7 p.m. Monday, May 14, at the home. One student's speech is on history of cowboys.

June, August meetings 7:30 p.m. second Monday at restored railroad depot. A new state historical marker will be dedicated at the depot and bake sale held during "sidewalk days" July 27-28.

Society plans a booth at Chelsea Fair August 21-25 and third annual quilt show and sale September 15.

Dexter Society: Museum, 3443 Inverness, open 1-3 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays, beginning May 11.

The Society is to launch its quilt registry May 11. Quilt show 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, May 12, admission $1.

"Say YES to Michigan" display of local industries 1-3 p.m. Sunday, May 20, for Michigan Week. Museum's 14th birthday celebration 1-3 p.m. Sunday, June 24.

Museum open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday, Saturday, August 10-11, during "Dexter Daze" with exhibit about Dexter founder, Judge Samuel Dexter.

Manchester Society: 7:30 p.m. third Monday at Blacksmith Shop, 324 East Main. Jeff Marl, proprietor of Upper Deck store in Ann Arbor which deals in baseball cards, Tigers and U-M memorabilia, will talk about baseball cards May 21. Annual picnic June 18.

Milan Society: Outdoor flea market, featuring antiques and collectibles, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, July 28, at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Regular meetings 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House.

Pittsfield Society: Summer meetings, 7 p.m. first Wednesday at township hall, State and Ellsworth Roads, June, July and August.

In doing research for the May 6 history day on the bicentennial census, they found there were more oxen than horses in Pittsfield in 1850.

Salem Society: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 24, visit Tollgate Farm in Novi. The late owner established a foundation to preserve the 160 acre farm with circa 1840 Greek Revival house. Part of it will be a state 4-H farm.

The Society is mounting an exhibit, "The Vanishing Barns of Salem Township and a Vanishing Way of Life" Friday, Saturday, June 8, 9, in township hall. Open business hours Friday and for annual Flag Day parade Saturday.

Reception Friday evening for Matt Theeke, the young Greenhills School student who photographed and documented the remaining 80 historic barns in the township.

Coming monographs to be published by the Society include "Salem's Vanishing Farms" by Theeke and "The Farmer's Club of Salem" by Herb Conant.

Saline Society: Ever wonder what all is involved in restoring an old home? The Society is offering an in-progress home restoration tour/workshop 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, May 19, at the Layher, Bondie house, 6940 North Maple Road.

It's an 1895 Victorian farm house. The Bondies are in the throes of restoration and there will be contractors, vendors and building inspectors on hand to answer questions. Tickets, $4, at Manufacturer's Bank, Village Loft and the door.

The Society recently was given a gazebo by Ann Arbor Building Trades which they hope to make mobile and use at the fair, in parades and such.

Webster Society: 7:45 p.m. second Monday in member homes.

Ypsilanti Society: Museum, 220 North Huron, open 2-4 p.m. Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Archives open 9 a.m.-noon weekdays.

At 9 a.m. May 17 the museum will be the setting for the Michigan Week Mayor's Exchange Day buffet breakfast and reception to which 300 guests are invited.

Two upstairs rooms--the costume room and the library--are being rearranged and redecorated with new Victorian style wallpaper.

Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Radisson Hotel representatives recently toured the museum to familiarize themselves with it as a community resource that may interest visitors.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
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Mailing: Lucy Kooperman, 668-7174
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6:30 P.M. WEDNESDAY MAY 16, 1990
Dixboro Church Fellowship Hall
5221 Church Road Dixboro, Michigan

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U.S. Postage
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Ann Arbor, MI

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Ypsilanti Museum
220 North Huron Street
Ypsilanti MI 48197